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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine: (1) whether 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children have sex typed story preferences; and (2) whether an attempt on the part of parents to prevent sex stereotyping would affect sex typed preferences. A review of previous research discusses measures used to determine sex linked responses and the implications of results obtained. Subjects in this study were children attending a half-day preschool in Tallahassee, Florida. Parents of the children were generally well educated and had expressed an awareness for preventing sex discrimination in the rearing of their child. In Study A, 66 children were given the choice of hearing a story about a dinosaur (male linked subject matter), a princess (female linked subject matter), or a family (neutral). In Study B, with 50 children, the choice was between a story about a dump truck (male), a baby doll (female), or a family (neutral). It was hypothesized that the children would show sex typed preferences, that sex typed preferences would be greater for boys, and that there would be an increase in sex linked choice with age. Results for Study A supported the hypotheses, indicating that preschoolers did evidence a sex identity in choosing a type of story to hear, with boys less likely to choose the cross sex choice than girls. There was also a slight increase of sex linked choice with age. Results of Study B also indicated sex linked preferences with those preferences greater for boys, but no increase of sex linked choice with age. It was concluded from the data that children (especially boys) have already established a fairly clear sex role identity by age 2. The implications these findings have for educating and rearing children without sex stereotyping are discussed. (SB)

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ARE STORY PREFERENCES SEX-LINKED FOR 2 AND 3 YEAR OLDS AND FOR 4 AND 5 YEAR OLDS?

Whether a person is male or female biologically is dependent upon genetic and biological processes; but, whether a person is male or female socially and psychologically is dependent upon learning, environmental factors and experiential development. Society has approved characteristics associated with males and females. Traditionally our culture's sex role expectations require more dependence, passivity and nurturance from females and more aggression from males. Children's games, toys and fantasy heroes corroborate these (Kagan, 1964). Research has shown that children become aware of sex differences at an early age. Sex role identity is conceptualized as a total pattern of characteristics that mark persons as masculine or feminine both to themselves and others. The major determinants in children of sex role are their perception of similarity between themselves and their parents and the degree to which the child adopts games and masters skills traditionally encouraged for his sex.

In the literature sex role learning studies have been linked with several factors: number and sex of younger and older siblings, parental preference of roles and mother and/or father dominance. For the purpose of this study, emphasis has been placed on the age of acquisition and the instruments typically used to measure sex role identity.

After an extensive review of the literature, Fauls and Smith (1956) used a picture interview technique to measure the five

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year old children's self-concept in regard to sex roles and their perception of parental definition of their appropriate sex role. This study indicated that by the age of five, middle class children of both sexes have clearly identified with the appropriate sex role and that an improtant factor in relation to the child's perceptions of appropriate parental choices of play materials was the closeness of the relationship with the father. From this we can see that children perceive their parents as indoctrinatin them into the appropriate sex role.

Most of the studies relating to sex role identification and development rely on an instrument developed by Daniel Brown in 1956. The It Scale for Chidren (ITSC) is a projective test of sex role preference administered individually to children. In this test the child is presented with a drawing of an ambiguous child figure referred to as "It" and is asked to choose what It would like in a series of 36 picture cards (objects and figures). Scores can range from 0, exclusively feminine choices, to 84, exclusively masculine choices. Brown's sample consisted of children ranging in age from five to eleven years. A distinctive sex role preference existed for boys and girls at all ages. A number of children showed a mixed preference pattern although this was two times as frequent in girls than boys. Boys also showed a significantly greater preference for the masculine role than girls did for the feminine role.

In 1960, Hartup and Zook conducted a study designed to extend Brown's work with the ITSC, to obtain information on the sex role

preferences of three and four year old children. They concluded that three and four year old children did exhibit sex role preferences and that there was some indication that this intensified with age; four year olds scored as more feminine or masculine on the ITSC than three year olds.

As part of a larger series of cross-cultural studies of sex identity, Nadelman (1974) administered a recall, knowledge and preference task for masculine and feminine items to working and middle class American five and eight year old children. The hypotheses were confirmed that children would prefer same sex items more than opposite sex items, that this preference would be stronger in boys than girls and that older boys and older working class children of both sexes would show greater stereotypy of preferences than did younger groups. When this data was compared with data collected from English children, American girls were much less sex stereotyped than American boys or English boys and girls.

Vener and Snyder (1966), developed another instrument to measure a child's sex identity by the use of artifacts linked with adult sex roles; appearance items (clothing and accessories) and task items (household tools and equipment). Their findings demonstrated that 30 to 40 month old children were already well on their way toward attaining the discriminative ablility of seven to eleven year olds. The authors linked this to the decelerating curve of development delineated by Benjamin Bloom in Stability and Change in Human Characteristics. Another conclu-

sion discussed by the authors was that the majority of the girls' preferences were same sex choices at all ages, whereas boys did not choose a majority of same sex items until the age of 51 to 60 months.

Much discussion of late has been concerned with the effect of Women's Lib, the increased number of working mothers and the Equal Rights Movement has or will have on the acquisition of sex role identity. Will there be a change in the developmental sequence children go through and will there be more evidence of cross sex choices? An early study connecting women's work status and their children's concept of the future role of themselves and others, indicated that at least with older children, there were some significant implications (Hartley, 1960). From an interview/questionnaire the author drew several conclusions: (1) whether or not a child had a working mother made no difference in the assignment of non-domestic work roles to women by girls but was significant with boys; (2) significantly more daughters of nonworking mothers mentioned housewife as the first choice of future occupation than daughters of working mothers; (3) significantly more daughters of working mothers said that they thought they would work after they had children; (4) daughters of working mothers tended to choose nontraditional future vocations; and (5) sons of nonworking mothers did not plan for their wives to work.

The subjects of this come from homes and parents who for the most part express an awareness for preventing sex discrimination

in their child's life. The parents are well educated, many with advanced degrees. Seeing the children in their day to day school setting and talking to the parents revealed many inconsistencies. Even these children, as young as they were, very clearly exhibited sex-linked preference in their play activities. Whatever the reason for this ____ peer relations, family background or the fact that all of their teachers were female, the children could verbalize the reasons why they preferred these activities; "It's dirty", "That's sissy".

Reading out loud to children is a very important part of a preschoolers day and often the children themselves choose the stories. Various techniques have been used in previous research to determine sex role identity in children. It was the purpose of this study to develop and conduct an interest inventory to determine if preschool children, aged two to five years, would indicate a definite sex role identity in their choice of the subject of a story. It will be of interest to see if children who are products of an era when there is increased concern for less delineation of definite sex roles, will indicate less sex linked choice than previous studies have shown. Secondly, if such sex-linked preferences do exist, at how early an age will they be manifested?

A hypothetical force choice question was posed to two groups of middle class children attending a half-day preschool in Tallahassee, Florida. The study was conducted in two parts; the same question was used in each part but the forced choice

categories were different. The children were asked whether they would rather hear a story about a dinosaur, princess or family (Study A); a dumptruch, baby doll or family (Study B). The exact form of the question follows:

> I (the researcher) want to ask you a pretend question. Pretend that I had three stories and I am going to read one to you. The stories are about (Study A) a dinosaur, a princess and a family; (Study B) a dumptruck a baby doll and a family. Which would you like to hear about?

There were two hypotheses formed for the study. 1.) Preschoolers will evidence a sex role identity in choosing a type of story to hear; more boys will choose to hear a story about dinosaurs (dumptrucks) than girls and more girls will choose to hear a story about a princess (baby doll) than boys. 2.) There will be an increase in sex-linked choice with age.

The study was conducted in two parts during April and May, 1976. The interest inventory was presented in the exact manner in each part except different categories were used. Choosing dinosaurs as an indicator of male-linked subject matter in the first study did not hold up. These particular children had studied dinosaurs in the course of their school experience and there seemed to be a universal interest in the subject regardless of sex. Also using a fantasy item, princess, in the first part of the study seemed to be more akin to the older

child's interest in fairy tales and make believe. In the second study an effort was made to compensate for this by using possibly more sex linked subjects (dumptruck, baby dolls and family again as the neutral response). Each child was asked the question in a one to one situation during their participation in their natural play setting. The order of the choices was varied to prevent a bias of order.

In Study A sixty-eight children were presented with the question. Two children were discarded from the sample when they would not make a choice among the presented subject matter. Sixty-six children, 24 girls and 42 boys, were included in the final data. Table 1 presents the distribution of choice by sex. Table 2 and 3 present the distribution by sex and age over the three categories. The data collected from the four and five year olds was collapsed into one table and the same was true for two and three year olds. This was done because of the small number of children questioned in the five year old range (11) and the two year old range (7).

In Study B fifty children were presented with the forced choice question, twenty-six girls and twenty-four boys. Table 4 presents the distribution of choice by sex. Table 5 and 6 present the distribution of sex by age over the three categories.

Insert Tables 1 - 6

The data was collected and analyzed using a Chi Square Formula. There were significances in both Study A and B for both hypotheses. Study A - the analysis indicated that preschoolers did evidence a sex identity in choosing a type of story to hear, boys chose the male linked subject and girls chose the female linked subject. There was also a slight increase of sex linked choice with age; four and five year olds were more likely to choose the sex linked category than two and three year olds. Study B - Again hypothesis 1 was supported. The new categories intensified the sex linked choice but there was not an increase of sex linked choice with age. In both studies the girls of all ages were more likely to choose the cross sex category, or especially the neutral response, than boys. Boys rarely made the feminine choice, in fact, in Study B when the categories were created in an effort to appear more sex linked, only one boy out of 24 made the feminine choice (baby doll).

For preschoolers an interest inventory was an adequate instrument to use. From this data it can be concluded that children of this background already have established a fairly clear sex role identity by the age of two, especially among boys, which confirms earlier findings by Hartup and Zook (1960) and Nadelman (1974). There was no evidence to indicate that the Equal Rights Movement has had a changing effect on the acquisition of sex role identity. Perhaps it would have had more impact on older children who had clearly established

their sex role identity. In previous studies, girls have never shown as strict a preference for role identity as boys (Bloom, 1956) and this seemed to be supported by this interest inventory. The girls were more likely to choose the neutral response than the boys. We can hypothesize that perhaps this is an attempt to choose anything other than the clearly sex linked choice. Maybe a further research step would be to once again ask the hypothetical question but only allow two choices, leaving out the neutral choice. By forcing a definite sex linked choice perhaps a better picture of preschooler's sex role identity could be gained.

Preschoolers are seeking to establish a sex role identity and this identification is necessary in further developing the child's personality and self-concept. As society supports more equalization of opportunity regardless of sex, we as teachers need to support and infact hasten the process. Literature, games, toys and role playing are ways through which young children develop their sex role identity and these are the things that teachers can largely control.

Much of what children learn about the world around themis through the literature they are exposed to. Many parents ask their children's teachers for recommended books to read aloud. Do the stories we read out loud or recommend show the female in assertive leadership roles as often as the male? Are boys allowed to express their emotions and be loving or

nurturant in their characterization? A list of non-sexist should be available and referred to whenever possible. Many children only experience the world outside of their neighborhood through stories. What can we do to make this experience a supporting and equal one for all children regardless of sex?

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Table 1

CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER BY SEX

	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Princess	9*	7	16
Dinosaur	8	33*	41
Family	7	2	9
Total	24	42	66

Table 2

CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER BY SEX AND AGE (4 and 5 year olds)

	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Princess	6*	3	9
Dinosaur	3	19*	22
Family	2	0	2
Total	11	22	33

Table 3

CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER BY SEX AND AGE (2 and 3 year olds)

	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Princess	2*	5	7
Dinosaur	5	14*	19
Family	5	2	7
Total	12	21	33

* $p < .01$

Table 4

CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER BY SEX

	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Baby Doll	11*	1	12
Dumptruck	2	19*	21
Family	13	4	17
Total	26	24	50

Table 5

CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER BY SEX AND AGE (4 and 5 year olds)

	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Baby Doll	9	1	10
Dumptruck	2	15	17
Family	6	3	9
Total	17	19	36

Table 6

CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER BY SEX AND AGE (2 and 3 year olds)

	GIRLS	BOYS	TOTAL
Baby Doll	2	0	2
Dumptruck	0	4	4
Family	7	1	8
Total	9	5	14

* $p < .01$